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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the degree of assimilation of Mexican Americans and the school system they attend was examined. Seven basic types of assimilation were studied--cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitudinal, behavioral, and civic assimilation. A questionnaire was administered to 8th grade students in 9 public and 9 parochial schools in San Antonio, Texas. In each school system, 3 schools were classified as middle class, 3 as working class, and 3 as lower class according to the parents' occupation. The final sample consisted of 383 students (168 in public schools and 215 in parochial) who indicated that their mother and/or father were of Mexican American descent. Therefore, parentage rather than surname was the basis for ethnic determination. In order to provide some control for those variables related to residential location, both public and parochial schools which were in close physical proximity were selected. Some findings were: (1) Mexican Americans in parochial schools showed greater overall assimilation and scored higher in cultural, structural, (tendency toward) marital, attitudinal, and civic assimilation; (2) those in public schools demonstrated greater identificational assimilation; and (3) there was virtually no difference between the groups in behavioral assimilation. (NQ)

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ASSIMILATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS: PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS VERSUS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Assimilation refers to a process which basically tends to make a socially homogeneous group out of one that was heterogeneous. This concept has been used often, and has been understood and defined in numerous ways. For the present research, the explantion and framework provided by Milton Gordon was adopted. As such, assimilation was seen to involve seven basic subprocesses each of which may be thought of as constituting a particular stage or aspect of the assimilation process. These are: cultural, structural, maritial, identificational, attitudinal, behavioral, and civic assimilation. Not only is the entire assimilation process a matter of degree but each of the subtypes or stages may likewise take place in varying degrees. Utilizing this framework, an attempt has been made in the present study to examine the relationship between the school system attended by Mexican Americans and their degree of assimilation.

Eight hypotheses were tested, based on the preceding types. It was predicted that there was no relationship between each of the seven indicated types or aspects of assimilation and attendance at either a public or parochial school. An additional hypothesis stated that there was no difference in the degree of overall assimilation between Mexican Americans in the public school system and those in the parochial system. This then, in a sense, is a summary of the seven separate types of assimilation.

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Research Design

During the first three months of 1973 a questionnaire answered anonymously was administrated to eighth grade students in eighteen schools in San Antonio, Texas. Half of the schools selected were public and

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half were parochial. Of the nine schools utilized in each of the two school systems, three were classified as middle class, three as working class, and three as lower class. The classification was made on the basis of the occupations of parents according to the criteria established by Hollingshead. This was done to ensure the comparability of socio-cultural context found within the two school systems. A further safe-guard of comparability was attempted by selecting public and parochial schools which were in close physical proximity to each other. This was done to provide some control over those variables which are related to residential location.

The eighth grade was chosen because it allowed the optimun number of years of parochial school influence before the students left grade school, at which time many parochial school students, because of increasing costs and the small number of parochial high schools available, continue their education in public high schools. Also, it has been well documented that after grade school the dropout rate is very high and a type of self-selection process apprears to take place which eliminates those who are having learning, ecomic and/or socio-cultural problems.

Questionnaires were given to all students, but only those of respondents who indicated that their mother and/or father were of Mexican American descent were included in the final sample. The only exceptions were in those cases where it was indicated that the other parent was Black or Oriental, in which event they too were excluded. Therefore, parentage rather than surname was the basis for ethnic determination.

It was felt that this procedure resulted in a more realistic classification reflecting general social defintions. On this basis, the final sample was composed of 383 students, of whom 168 attended public schools and 215 attended parochial schools.

In addition to a general information sheet, the instrument was comprised of seven sections, one for each type of assimilation. Sections I through IV (acculturation, civic, identificational and behavior receptional assimilation) were made up of Likert-type statements. Section V (attitude receptional assimilation) was composed of statements and rankings of religious and ethnic groups. Section VI (attitude toward amalgamation) included statements and listing of surnames of members of the opposite sex with whom the respondent had, or would like to have, a date. Section VII (structural assimilation) requested the listing of friends by surname, in school, neighborhood and overall. In addition, the respondent was instructed to list membership in clubs, teams, groups and associations, indicating whether each was ethnically and religiously mixed.

All statements utilized were designed and tested to differentiate between the responses of WASPs and those of persons socialized in a Latin or Spanish-speaking culture or subculure. Statements were subjected to two separate pretests, one involving native Latin Americans and native WASPs from Louisiana, and the other involving Mexican Americans and Anglos from San Antonio. Final selction of items was made according to the procedure recommended by Edwards.

Since the objective of this research was to ascertain the degree of assimilation of Mexican Americans into our WASP society, the "correct" answer, for scoring purposes, was that which the majority of the white Anglo Protestants in Baton Rouge chose, but only in terms of the general agreement or disagreement.

Data were handled in several different ways in order to better understand the results. In order to see if differences in responses between public and parochial school students were significant Student's t was computed. The alpha level was set at .05. In testing hypotheses, the date were treated both as ordinal level, and as interval level. The Mann-Whitney U test was used considering the data as ordinal level.

Finally, correlation coefficients using the Pearson r, were computed between each of the seven sections and between each section and the total.

Findings

Seven of the eight null hypotheses were rejected. Only the hypothesis dealing with behavior receptional assimilation (absence of discrimination) failed to be rejected at the .05 level. This means, therefore, that there is a difference in the degree of overall assimilation between eighthgrade Mexican Americans in public schools and those in parochial schools.

Eighth grade Mexican American students in the parochial schools were found to be much more assimilated than their fellow ethnic group members in publuc schools. Not only did they have a higher total score, but they also scored higher on six of the seven sections. The only section on which the Mexican Americans in public schools scored higher was that dealing with identificational assimilation.

It is also, of interst to note on five of the seven sections, the

variance for Mexican Americans in public schools is larger than for those in parochial schools. This would seem to indicate that there is, in general, a greater divergence of opinion among those in public schools in most areas under consideration. The exceptions were in the section which measured identificational assimilation, and that which measured behavior recetional assimilation.

When controlling for each of the test factors the results were generally the same although there was some variation. It should be noted that there is a general consistent pattern of higher assimilation scores for parochial school students in all types except identificational assimilation which invariably favors public school respondents.

Both females and males attending parochial schools had significantly higher means than their public school counterparts. It can also be seen that females in general had higher means than males.

Catholics in parochial schools showed a significantly greater degree of overall assimilation than those in public schools. Although the difference was not significant, Catholics in general had higher means than non-Catholics when compared regardless of school system.

There was virtually no difference between middle class respondents, but the difference between working class students in parochial schools and those in public schools was very significant. When respondents from the two SES groups were compared without regard for school system, the middle class showed a significantly greater degree of assimilation.

Students were classified high, medium or low in religiosity depending on their responses to the questions regarding the frequency of church attendance, family prayer, Bible readin, and whether or not they received religious instruction and religious training. In comparing those from the two school systems it was found that praochial school students classified high and medium had higher assimilation scores, but only for the latter group was the difference significant. It was not possible to compare those from the two school systems who were classified as low in RE due to the fact that only one individual was so classified in parochial schools. When comparing groups regardless of school attended, a direct relationship appeared between RE and assimilation. It should be noted that the distribution of parochial school respondents in terms of RE is skewed to the high side, while that of the publuc school respondents is normal. Of the 215 parochial school respordents 36 percent were classified high and 64 perecent medium. The 168 public school respondents were classified as follows: 26 percent high, 50 percent medium, 24 percent low.

Three categories of Aspórational level, high, medium and low, were utilized with the criteria for classifying individuals being their responses to the questions regarding desire to sttend college, probability of attending, and desired future career. Respondents in all three classifications from parochial schools showed a greater degree of assimilation and differences between the school systems were sighificant in two of the comparisons. An inter-group comparison revealed a direct relationship between AL and assimilation.

(put TABLE 8 here)

Respondents were placed into one of three categories appearing in Table 8 depending on the length of time they had been in the school system currently attended. Those who had spent at least two-thirds of their total educational career in the same system were classified as high, between two-thirds and one-third were medium, and less than one-third were low. It is shown in Table 8 that high and medium SSAC respondents from parochial schools had higher mean scores, with the difference between the former groups being very significant. There were too few respondents (3) classified as low in public schools to allow a comparison to be made. The majority of students from both systems had spent virtually their entire school career in the same system.

In addition to inter-system comparisons, a comparison was also made within each school system. Results of comparisons in the parochial school system indicated the existance of a direct relationship between SSAC and assimilation while in the public school system there was no difference between those classified high and medium.

(put TABLE 9 here)

The schools themselves were classified as types 1,2,3 or 4 ECST depending on the percentage of Mexican Americans represented among the respondents. Type 1 schools were those which had the highest percentage while type 4 schools were those with the lowest. Table 9 shows that parochial school respondents from type 1 ECST schools had higher means. In schools where the student body was at least 75 percent Mexican American the difference between the assimilation means of the two groups was extremely significant. There were no types 3 or 4 parochial schools, since all were at least 50 percent Mexican American, and only one of each of these types

was found among the public schools.

In both school systems there was a direct relationship between percentage of Anglos in the class and the assimilation of the Mexican American respondents. Differences between respondents from the various type schools were very significant within the public system, but not within the parochial system.

Discussion and Conclusions

There were three general and consistent patterns which emerged in the study: first, Mexican Americans in parochial schools showed greater overall assimilation and scored significantly higher in cultural, structural, (tendency toward) marital, attitude receptional and civic assimilation; second, those in public schools demonstrated greater identificational assimilation; third, there was virtually no difference between the groups in behavior receptional assimilation.

From the foregoing, it appears that parochial school Mexican Americans are, on the average, more assimilated than those in public schools, and this relationship between school system and assimilation persists even when other variables are controlled. It would seem that there are several possible reasons for this. In general, private schools enjoy a higher status, and are thus able to confer greater prestige on their students and graduates, than public schools. Since not everyone can or will enter a private school there is a type of self selection at work, which may result in an uneven distribution of "high strivers" in such schools. At the same time, the schools themselves are committed to the ideal of offering the students a better and more personalized education than is possible to achieve in public schools. This ideal is generally reflected in the recruitment and employment of the school's faculty, who in turn, are

expected to reflect it in the classroom. In the concrete situation, this commitment to the betterment of the students may lead, consciously or unconsciously, to the "Anglicization" or "Americanization" of them since this is what will be rewarded in and by society.

In addition, in the case of parochial schools, there may be other factors working which tend to maximize this assimilative effect. All students, regardless of minority group membership, are accepted and united through Catholicism. Given this common bond and identity, together with the small size of the school, which does not allow students to group together in ethnic enclaves, the result is greater structural assimilation, which as Gordon has pointed out leads to all other types of assimilation (1964:81).

The one type of assimilation which consistently favored Mexican Americans in public schools was identificational assimilation. One of the reasons for this may be found in the degree of emphasis given to the individual's identity as an American in each of the school systems. To anyone who has ever attended a parochial school it is immediately evident that a person's main identity is derived from his or her membership in the Church. This is what is taught and stressed. (Witness the great number of supporters enjoyed by Notre Dame teams from among Catholics all over the country). It is thus Church membership which unites all peoples, making them members of the same family in which God is their Father and the Virgin Mary is their Mother. This identity crosscuts every nationality, every race, and every time period. The recent Ecumenical Council Vatican II has reaffirmed this position (Abbott,1966:14-37).

On the other hand, in public schools it is a person's citizenship and identity as an American which unites all members of the student body, as

well as the community. While most classes in parochial schools begin with a prayer--now absent in public schools--more frequent recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem are common in the public schools.

Consistent with this was the finding that no matter which control variable was introduced into the analysis, the difference favoring public school students failed to disappear or substantially diminish. Additional support came from the finding that non-Catholics showed greater identificational assimilation than Catholics regardless of the school attended.

The only type of assimilation in which no significant difference was found was behavior receptional assimilation (absence of discrimination). This finding is really not surprising when one considers the fact that this aspect, or type of assimilation, perhaps more than any other, depends not on the minority group but on the dominant group. While every type of assimilation depends on both internal forces, within the individual, and external forces found in society, that type dealing with discrimination is largely determined by the external forces (Schermerhorn, 1970).

When society, or a portion of society, discriminates against a minority group it is not really important what school a particular minority group member attends. The discrimination is not directed against a person as an individual, but as a member of a group, and the school one attends does not change that membership. Blumer explains how both prejudice and discrimination are based on group membership (1961:217-28;1955).

The difficulty with being behavior receptionally assimilated, therefore, is that it is not merely an individual matter, and, apparently,

the school one attends is not really that important when dealing with ethnic discrimination. Some light is shed on this by Jack Forbes (1970:15) who wrote:

> Mexican-Americans are, therefore, a racial as well as a cultural minority and the racial differences which set them apart from Anglos cannot be made to "disappear" by any "Americanization" process carried on in the schools.

In conclusion, it appears that parochial schools are as good or better than public schools in promoting the assimilation of their Mexican American students with but one exception, identificational assimilation. In this case the public school system is clearly superior. Whether the complete assimilation of Mexican Americans, or any other minority group, is desirable (especially when this takes the form of Anglo-conformity) is another question. Therefore, the data do not dictate which school system is preferable or "better" for minority group members to attend. Ultimately, this will depend on the goals and aspirations of the members themselves.

It would be somewhat ironical, however, if on the one hand the United States government sets as a goal the assimilation of its minority groups, while on the other it brings about, through action or inaction, the demise of one of the very institutions which is doing just this.

TABLE 1

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN EACH OF THE SECTIONS AND EACH SECTION AND THE TOTAL

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5	Section 6	Section 7	Total
Section 1	1.000							
Section 2	0.383	1.000						
Section 3	0.007	0.277	1.000					
Section 4	0.147	0.262	0.284	1.000				
Section 5	0.364	0.334	0.163	0.280	1.000			
Section 6	0.101	0.172	0.147	0.088	0.124	1.000		
Section 7	0.268	0.232	0.196	0.246	0.327	0.522	1.000	
Total	0.606	0.693	0.522	0.571	0.636	0.430	0.603	1.000

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TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF MEAN ASSIMILATION SCORES BY SECTION

Section and Type Assimilation	School System				Test	
	Public		Parochial			
	Mean	Var	Mean	Var	t	U
1 (Cultural)	49.9	40.8	53.1	39.9	4.86‡	4.56‡
2 (Civic)	41.8	33.1	44.2	18.9	4.57‡	4.72‡
3 (Identificational)	38.9	31.8	37.6	47.1	2.04*	1.45
4 (Behavior Receptional)	27.2	25.4	27.4	29.1	0.27	0.61
5 (Attitude Receptional)	31.5	22.6	33.7	17.8	4.84‡	4.66‡
6 (Marital)	16.3	11.4	17.0	10.8	2.03*	2.06*
7 (Structural)	7.1	12.4	8.1	9.2	2.79†	3.42‡
Total Score (Overall)	212.7	411.3	221.1	272.3	4.33†	4.61‡

N=383

*Significant at .05 level

†Significant at .01 level

‡Significant at .001 level

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